



Press Release, August 29, 1988

NATIONALIST UNREST SPREADS - STUDENTS THREATEN TO DEMONSTRATE -
DISSIDENT'S TRIAL DISRUPTED - VISITING US CONGRESSMEN EXPRESS CONCERN

Students at the University of Tibet in Lhasa are threatening renewed demonstrations if a fellow student is brought to trial for alleged involvement in anti-Chinese rioting last March, according to tourists who returned to London this week.

On 16th April student Lobsang Tenzin, 23, was charged with 3 others by Chinese police with the murder of Chinese policeman Yuan Shisheng, who fell from the roof of a post office during the 5th March riot, in which up to 30 Tibetans and 1 Chinese are said to have died. Beijing officials on 4th April promised to execute those responsible for the policeman's death.

Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists have both expressed concern about these and other prisoners, including two facing the death sentence for burning a bus during the October demonstration, and another Tibetan charged with discussing independence with a foreign tourist. Requests that the Chinese allow independent observers at the trials have so far been unsuccessful. Last year less than 2% of trials in China were won by the defense.

At the University, where over 50% of students are Chinese immigrants, Tibetan students turned an end-of-term poll into a political protest by voting Lobsang Tenzin as model student of the year. Students told journalists accompanying three US Congressmen on a fact-finding visit to Lhasa last week that there would be disturbances if the trials went ahead. "Only world opinion is keeping him alive", one is reported to have said.

Concern for the prisoners was also expressed by the visiting Congressmen, although the three are said to have been chosen for their pro-Chinese line on the Tibet issue. Democratic Congressman Charlie Rose, long-time supporter of Tibetan Human Rights, was told by Chinese officials that he could not join the group as Lhasa hotels were fully booked. Since unrest began last September tourists have been heavily restricted from visiting Tibet except for special groups.

Language Protests Increase

Other reports show dramatically increased activity on the language issue, with students threatening to demonstrate if the Panchen Lama's July '87 promises that Tibetan would become the official language of the region are not fulfilled. Others threatened to walk out of university proceedings if they were not held in Tibetan. At present all university courses are taught in Chinese except those in Tibetan medicine and language.

At a Party meeting held in Lhasa 23rd July - 1st August to discuss 'The Question of the Study of Tibetan Culture', Tibetan delegates heavily criticized the failure of officials to introduce Tibetan as the official language, and repeated their criticisms on local television on 1st August. It is reported that the Panchen Lama and Ngawang Ngabo Jigme, Beijing's two senior ethnic Tibetan officials, were not allowed to speak at the meeting for fear that they would be too outspoken.

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Strict Policies Enforced

Tension in Tibet is reported to have increased since Chinese politburo member Qiao Shi's visit in July when he said, "the regional government must adopt a policy of merciless repression". Beijing news agencies reported on June 25th that an elite police unit specially trained to crush anti-Chinese uprisings had been moved to Lhasa. Reports this week say its strength has been doubled from 500 to 1000 strong. Tibetans in exile in India have expressed grave concern over reports that the Party secretary has been replaced by the army commander of the Tibet Military Area, Jiang Hongquan.

Current policy, described privately by one official as 'open up on the outside; get more strict on the inside', appears to include a policy of intimidation, with large numbers of suspected dissidents being imprisoned without charge for 1 - 2 months. Almost all prisoners released so far report ill-treatment, beatings and, in many cases, torture. Verbatim statements reaching the West this week include detailed descriptions of electric batons being placed in the mouth and genitals, and of prisoners having their wrists tied behind their backs and being suspended by their arms from the ceiling.

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